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Lessons Drawn From the Past History of the Education of the Deaf to Guide Us in Our Present Work.

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History shows that, in every age, any deficiency in mental development, or in the ability to communicate with others or in being self-supporting which the deaf have shown, may be charged to the ignorance of their social environment and not to any inability of the deaf to learn, be or do anything and everything for which they are given the opportunity.

Aristotle declared deaf mutes to be incapable of instruction, and the Poet Lucretius endorsed his opinion as late as 50 B. C.

Under the laws of Lycurgus they were exposed to die, and the ancient Romans threw deaf infants into the Tiber. The authorities of those days ranked them with imbeciles. Modern experience proves that it was the ignorance of the authorities and not any mental deficiency in their victims which made them "dumb." Fortunately for the victims, the authorities only had power over the bodies of the sufferers and the climax of their cruelty only opened the doors of the higher life to them.

presented by the author -

Occasionally parents would hide away their deaf offsprings and give them some instruction to which they, of course, responded, and gradually it dawned upon a few minds that they might not be idiots. From that time, until the second half of the eighteenth century, we read of isolated cases of deaf persons in different countries who were educated according to the skill and knowledge of their teachers, and also of some schools in the monasteries. It is said, however, that as late as the present century the Pagans of India and other Asiatic countries were still in the habit of killing their deaf infants.

The schools and work established through the Abbe de l'Epee, Heinecke, Amman before him, and by Braidwood, all give evidence that the deaf were only waiting their chance to absorb and take in everything that is allowed them. We owe them the best we have. Ever since the Abbe Tarra, President of the International Convention of Teachers of the Deaf, held at Milan in 1880, who had had an experience of thirty years in teaching the deaf—the first ten by the sign method, the second ten by the combined, and the third ten by the oral method—gave his verdict that “Every deaf child capable of being taught by signs is capable of being taught by the oral method, without exception,” it has seemed to us that the question of methods was settled and that from that time nothing remained to be done but to work for the effectual, intelligent and universal application of the method. If there are any flaws in its application let us find them and correct them.

Why should we make any deaf child wait until it is of school age to learn the speech and language that the hearing learn before? We know they can learn at the natural age if we only help and guide them and surround them with speech and only speech. The deaf child who only gets the oral school training, even though it be the best possible, is forever more or less handicapped by what it lost beforehand. While the present

need is for efficiently and intelligently conducted Homes and Schools for the training in speech and education of the deaf, may we not hope that within a very few generations Society may do its whole duty to them so entirely that they may everywhere be an active part of their social spheres and no longer need special provisions of any kind. Such a state of affairs would be a no greater stride in progress than has already been made on their behalf and is exactly in the line of what is being done. All that is needed is to give every deaf child the same amount of repetition of language that a hearing one gets when it is learning, and directs its attention invariably to the mouth, to the exclusion of every other mode of communication. The habit of looking at the mouth is very soon acquired in this way.

In regard to the learning of trades by the deaf, we know that they must ply them among hearing people—then why not learn them from hearing people? We know from experience that it is possible for them to do so and would plead earnestly that they be allowed the opportunity of accustoming themselves to working among the people with whom they will later be forced to do business. Let us in every way try to lead them forward ; they will do their share of the work if we only give them a genuinely fair chance.

